

Bob Ryan

House Bill 214

Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee

December 11, 2017

Dear Chairman and committee members,

My name is Robert Ryan and my wife and I are parents of 11 wonderful children – all shapes and sizes, all wonderful human beings and great additions to the human race. My wife and I always wanted a big family and have certainly been Blessed. It is hard to imagine not having any of our children. Are they all perfect – certainly not. Are they good human beings, law abiding citizens, and contributing member of society – Yes. Would the world be worse off for not having any of them – Yes.

Our youngest child is Megan and has Down Syndrome. We did not have prenatal testing done with any of our children. As I have said, we wanted a big family and were prepared for what we were given.

Within 2 hours of Megan's birth, we were told she had Down Syndrome. Immediately the hospital staff's mood changed and people started telling us they were sorry. We were being counseled to think about placing Megan in an institution. All the while we were holding our beautiful healthy new born little girl. It was a bizarre moment.

Our thoughts were, why are you sorry? Because Megan is not perfect? Fortunately we were old enough and experienced enough to know that there is no perfect baby or human being. We knew that with eleven children, Megan would be the least of our worries, and over the years that has certainly proved correct.

Megan is now 23 years old and has had a wonderful life. She attended grade school at the same parish grade school that her 10 older siblings graduated from, graduated from Bishop Hartley High School on the East side of Columbus, and is currently in her 4th year of a Certificate Program at The Ohio State University. She has several very meaningful employment prospects upon her graduation next spring.

Megan may not be the most productive member of our society based on today's societal measures, but she will certainly add value to today's world. Megan has already changed countless lives. Thousands of today's lives would not be as fulfilled if Megan had not been part of them. There is not enough time in this hearing to give you the examples of how Megan has contributed to this world.

Megan has given those who know her the gifts of unconditional love, real joy and laughter, and an understanding of the meaning and benefits of diversity and openness to the needs of others. Those who have known Megan have a better understanding that we are all different, yet each one of us has something very different and valuable to offer to society.

Several weekends ago my wife and I and Megan attended a weekend at Deer Creek State Park for adults with Down Syndrome and their families. It was an event of my lifetime. Forty adults with Down Syndrome and their families and there was nothing but love, joy and laughter. Never a “wo is me”, and not a person in the group who would not support this bill. Testifying at this hearing is the result of a very interesting introspective query for me. Last week I encountered a news report of how Down Syndrome has been practically “eliminated” in Iceland. Due to the aborting of pregnancies suspected of being Down Syndrome, the number of infants born with Down Syndrome is practically non-existent in this country. Naturally, after having nurtured and raised a daughter for over 23 years with Down Syndrome, this article shook me. Many thoughts came to me, but primarily, how sad it was that anyone in today’s world could ever be proud of a statistic like this - what a sad commentary on that country and society. Where does this genetic selectivity stop, and who has the knowledge or power to decide who makes the cut!

We live in a very complicated and troubled world. I have a tendency to be very simplistic, but it seems to me that what our world needs is more humans that are filled with love, innocence, compassion and a constant desire to love and be loved.

For those of you who are familiar with scripture, let me remind you of Matthew 19: “Let the children come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “ There is no mention of those with only a certain color of eyes, hair, height, weight, athletic ability, high IQ’s, or perfect Chromosomes!

Thank you for your time and consideration.